



Worshippers at the Trafalgar Street Mosque, Rochdale



## Truth and Love

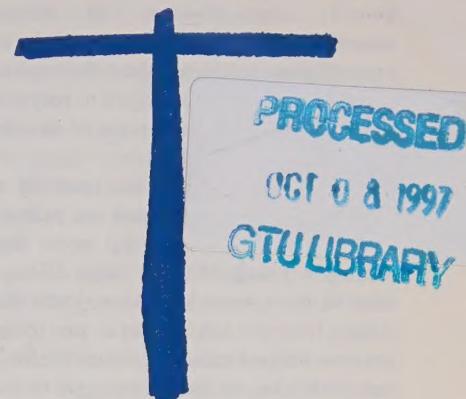
a Franciscan in InterFaith Dialogue  
by Bernard SSF

A great friend of SSF, Father Max Mizzi of the Conventual Friars in Assisi, wrote enthusiastically about the meeting there in 1986 of leaders of the great world religions. 'They came to pray in peace, in the spirit of love and reconciliation, in the footsteps of Saint Francis.' Francis' saintly combination of accepting-empathy with simple-truth certainly can serve as a model for us today.

Religion, alas, has long been the pretext of conflict, war and the persecution of minorities by the powerful. There are many terrible examples today. 'The Assisi spirit' means meeting people across divides. Rather than demonising others we can begin to see them as people. As Robert Runcie said about the 1986 meeting, 'you certainly feel differently about people when you have waited for the bus with them!'

Pope John Paul (who hosted the meeting) wrote in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*:

'those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and be open to understanding those of the other party, without pretence or closed-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side'. The document 'Dialogue and Proclamation' usefully lists four forms of such dialogue: *firstly*, the dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and



## InterFaith Matters

Experience and reflection combine in this issue as five contributors illustrate different approaches to people of other faiths, among whom many in Britain today live. It was significant that it was to Assisi that the present Pope called world religious leaders in 1986. Meetings at many levels have continued since and may have a special interest for Franciscans. Clarification of who we are as Christians does not necessitate rejection of those who are not.

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preoccupations; *secondly*, the dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people; *thirdly*, the dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each others' spiritual values; and *fourthly*, the dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual richness, for instance in regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God and the Absolute.

Genuine dialogue means knowing and trusting the other so that you can hear what is dearest to their heart: I'll never forget hearing a young Moslem father telling us what he most wanted his son to know about Allah. Dialogue can also set us free to share our own deepest treasures. Some exchanges can disturb us, so that we struggle to know both what we believe and how we can articulate it. Exchanges can also enrich, deepen and correct our own perceptions. Ideally we do not only seek to come where the other is, nor to bring them to where we are, but rather to go together to a place where neither of us has been before.

There was at one time a novice at Hilfield greatly influenced by Hindu beliefs. He saw all things as an incarnation of gods. I found my awareness of God in all things heightened so as to enter more into Francis' Canticle of the Creatures. I noticed, however, that his brothers and sisters in creation were pointers to God rather than gods: 'they speak to us of thee'. Francis, of course, is rooted in Christian scriptures like Psalm 19.1 and Romans 1.20 which point to the natural world as a disclosure, a theophany.

*Francis  
exemplifies  
both the truth of love  
and the love of truth  
and shows us  
that both are gifts of God*

Being nourished, then, by the experience of others, I ask myself at what point I offer a Christian understanding of this mystery and about the fullest expression of it: Jesus, the Logos incarnate, the 'express image of the God' (*Hebrews 1.3*).

With Buddhists, we may enter into silent attentiveness. It leads into 'the mystery of being' which Francis knew so deeply in his hermit and contemplative times. In the last chapter of the Rule of 1221, after speaking of God as Trinity, Francis ends with a catalogue of words including: '*invisible, indescribable, ineffable, incomprehensible, unfathomable*'. God is always much more than we can describe (is that why 'the Word

became flesh'?) and in silence we adore the mystery-in-communion. I do not understand Buddhist experience and philosophy enough to know whether the concept of losing the subject/object distinction, and merging into the oneness of the 'more than' is congruous with the Christian understanding of the distinctiveness of each person. But I note that Francis, in the height of ecstasy on La Verna, prayed: 'Who are you, my dearest God, and who am I . . .?' I believe that deep communion strengthens our identity: 'I am, because God is.' But the question here is 'Is the silent contemplation more important than the dialogue about this mystery?'

### *'No other god but our God has wounds'*

With Moslems, as with God's ancient people the Jews, the One-ness of God is paramount. Quickly the dialogue moves into matters of revelation, the Law, practical politics and the like. I asked a Jesuit Moslem scholar once whether I should share in the Moslem prostration prayers, which express their 'giving over' to Allah. He replied (but was he right?) that it would be like them sharing with me in Holy Communion. Nevertheless, in the holiness, the otherness of many a mosque, one is glad that one's shoes are removed, for 'the place where we stand is holy ground.' And to witness, as I did once in Safed, an old Jewish man wrapped in his prayer shawl swaying backwards and forwards as he chanted from the Torah, took me to the devotion of the psalms: 'I have taken greater delight in the way of your decrees than in all manner of riches.' We meet beyond words.

A young Moslem, in a group in our house here after a good evening, said, "If you could see that the prophet Mohammed is the last of the prophets, we could all be Moslems together." "Yes," I replied, "I see just what you mean; for if you could see that Jesus is 'more than a prophet', we could all be Christians together." But we find it isn't as simple as that! And there is plenty of room for arrogance, ignorance and triumphalism in our attitudes and words. Islam is a missionary religion: and so is Christianity.

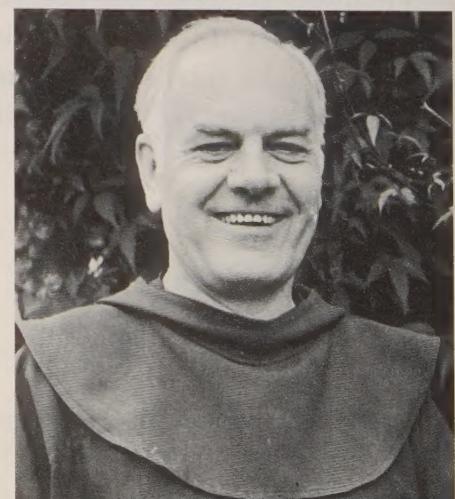
But *religion* is not the same as God's truth. Indeed, Karl Barth saw all religion as man-made. Certainly, you find similar 'religions' in different 'faiths'. If all our formulations are partial and distorted ('fingers to the moon') and they are clothed in different cultures, there is much chance of misunderstanding. The 'spectacles behind our eyes' mean we see things our way. Further, I have discovered how followers of different faiths vary as much between themselves as Christians do. Moslems in a group I was with were as embarrassed by the brashness of one of their own as I would be

by a Christian fundamentalist. But then again, Francis warned about the arrogance of the learned, for God 'reveals things to babes' (*Matthew 11.25*). Again, Francis insists that it is 'doing the will of God' rather than talking about it (*Matthew 12.50*) that matters.

In dialogue with Moslems, it is not long before a very different understanding of Jesus emerges, probably with a denial of the crucifixion, and certainly therefore of the resurrection. This central Christian understanding of God's self-disclosure 'reconciling all things to himself by the blood of the cross' (*Colossians 1. 15-20*) is for Christians non-negotiable: 'No other god but ours has wounds.'

In our part of London, dialogue is more likely to be about current community issues than fundamental beliefs, but I find the story of Francis and the Sultan goes down well at school assemblies. Perhaps Francis was still seeking martyrdom, but his bravery in crossing between the Crusader and the Moslem armies made a great impression on the Sultan. It also changed Francis. In Chapter 16 of the Rule of 1221, after quoting 'sent out as sheep among wolves', he wrote: 'The friars who are inspired by God to work among the Saracens and other unbelievers . . . can conduct themselves among them spiritually in two ways. One is to avoid quarrels or disputes and 'be subject to every human creature for God's sake' (*1 Peter 2.13*), so bearing witness to the fact that they are Christians. Another is to proclaim the Word of God openly, when they see that that is God's will, calling on their hearers to believe in God Almighty . . . that they may be baptised and become Christians.' For some Christians today, this is a stark choice indeed.

We all have our choices: few of such stark ones. Belief that the Father's purpose is to bring humanity to the Kingdom of his Son's likeness and that the energy of the Holy Spirit works in and beyond the Church to that end, can give us a basis and a confidence. Francis, living in a very different time from ours, exemplifies both the truth of love and the love of truth and shows us that both are gifts of God.



*Brother Bernard lives and works in Stepney in the East End of London*



# Faith at Work?

By Maureen Henderson CSP

**The South London Industrial Mission (SLIM) is an ecumenical Christian network of people exploring the relevance of faith to work and all aspects of the local economy. I joined the team of Chaplains in May 1991 with a particular brief to develop dialogue with members of other faith traditions in South London. Before coming to London, I had spent nine years at Walsall in the West Midlands in InterFaith community work. I soon discovered that building up networks of relationships in London is far more difficult than in a Midlands town where there is a strong sense of belonging. People in London relate to so many different places: they often live, work, shop, recreate and worship in quite separate areas. It was a real case of 'on my bike' (fortunately motorised) to find out where the people were.**

Developing interfaith relationships can only be done by building upon other people's work, and I received wonderful help from the South London Interfaith Group and the Interfaith Network. Sometimes, it can be impossible to gain entry without an introduction.

*The word Economy comes from the Greek oikos (house) and nomos (law or management). So basically I was trying to develop InterFaith dialogue on how we manage the household of this world, how we live together as human beings on Planet Earth*

This was borne out by my experience in Greenwich. I was trying to make contact with members of a Mosque and had been given the name of the president by the local vicar. I duly turned up on the doorstep one Saturday morning and my ring was answered by a crowd of small children. I asked to see their father and a very suspicious-looking man came to the door. The door was only opened about six inches and I knew I had to talk fast or that door was going to be closed. I mentioned the vicar's name and at once a beaming smile appeared on the man's face. The door was thrown wide open and I was welcomed in for a cup of tea. Some years before, that vicar had helped the Muslims obtain premises for their Mosque when there had been a lot of local opposition, and subsequent developments could not have happened without his support.

I started working on a three-year project for SLIM called 'MultiFaith Issues and Economic Developments'. Rather a mouthful and, although I had plenty of experience of multifaith issues, I was floundering with regard to the economics. I was greatly helped by the Senior Chaplain, Canon Peter Challen, who pointed out that the word comes from the Greek *oikos* (house) and *nomos* (law or management). So basically I was trying to develop InterFaith dialogue on how we manage the household of this world, how we live together as human beings on Planet Earth. The Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, commented: 'Humankind has many faiths but only one world in which to live', which succinctly expresses the challenge which confronts us all.

I saw the first area for dialogue to be 'What does it mean to be human?' 'How can we help each other to be more human?' A meeting was arranged one Saturday morning for members of that local Church and Mosque in Greenwich. We shared our creation stories and agreed that being human meant being in relationship with God, our fellow humans and the created order. The duties within those relationships were discussed and the importance of tolerance, peace and justice. We discovered that we had a great deal in common, although there were some sharp differences in theology and attitudes to law. We decided to meet again and a Muslim member suggested that we discuss 'How can Church and Mosque work together for justice and peace?' The Gulf War had started by the time we next met and so we considered the effect upon us locally and what we could do about it. After a very lively meeting, we produced a joint statement for the local press:

'WE BELIEVE in One God, Lord of Creation, God of Justice and Peace, who will judge all people with mercy and compassion. We declare our common concern for the

destructive effects of the Gulf War on God's creation and the hatred it can generate among God's people. We pray together for a just and peaceful solution.'

We then prayed in silence together, ending with the Muslims reciting their prayer and then the Christians saying the Lord's Prayer. It was the process of reaching that agreed statement which was so important. It took over an hour and a half and much heated discussion, but we learned so much about each other.

As the project developed, I became increasingly convinced that being human was the key area for dialogue and that it needed to be done at a local level. It is simply about how we relate as neighbours. In one Mosque, when I asked if members would like to meet with members of the local Church, one Muslim said, 'O yes please, because when I walk down the road wearing my little hat, people look at me as if I come from another planet!' How dehumanising for all concerned, I reflected sadly. Such local groups can develop better

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understanding and need to work together on neighbourhood concerns. Even where groups do not continue regularly, the established links are important when local incidents occur.

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together?”*

The Christendom Trust, who were part-funding the project, insisted on a monitoring group to ensure that their money was not being wasted. A Jewish woman and a Shia Muslim joined with two SLIM Chaplains to form a group. Neutral territory was the Wholemeal Cafe in Streatham on a Sunday afternoon, when we were allowed to spend a couple of hours evaluating and planning. A series of consultations was arranged when Jews, Christians and Muslims met on Sunday afternoons to explore the relationship of *Health and Wealth*, what it means to be *Living Healthily*, particularly socially and environmentally, and people's experience of *Changing Work Patterns*. We discovered a wealth of wisdom in the different faith traditions. The problem was the gap between wisdom and practice.

Could we help each other to narrow the gap? Always at the end of a consultation, the question was, "What can we do about it together?"

In October 1993, the Inner Cities Religious Council, a government initiative under the Department of the Environment, held a day conference for leaders of faith communities in South London. Much of the day was spent in Borough groups identifying areas of common concern and we were encouraged to go on meeting in those groups after the Conference. The Lambeth group gave just the focus we needed for a practical response to those consultations and so the Lambeth MultiFaith Action Group was formed. Our purpose is to improve the quality of life of Lambeth residents by working to overcome racism and religious discrimination, providing a programme of celebration and education. We are a group of representatives of some of the faith communities in Lambeth and are seeking to extend our membership. We have recently produced a small exhibition of our work which is being shown in the local public libraries as a launch for our Information Bank. This is simply a list of telephone numbers of contact people from the main faith communities in Lambeth for the use of individuals or statutory bodies needing information or advice.

Although a small group, we are friends who enjoy working together and we provide a network of support. When the local Synagogue was vandalised and daubed with racist graffiti, Christians and Muslims attended the following Friday evening prayers to register support. For the last three years, we have held an evening of shared food and entertainment at the Synagogue to celebrate One World Week. It is a celebration which is so important. We enjoy each other, and our differences are the distinctive features of people for whom we have a great respect and affection; and we do not want to change them.



Sister Maureen Henderson, of the Community of the Sacred Passion, has worked in Tanzania and lately in the West Midlands of England and in South London. The photograph shows her on the annual London Interfaith Pilgrimage, which began in 1986, the initiative of Brother Daniel Fauré, of Westminster Archdiocese Interfaith.

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# From Silence to Peace

by Elaine MacInnes OLM

**Even to a non-Franciscan, the name St Francis is synonymous with peace. We are told that Francis taught his companions to use the greeting 'The Lord give you peace', and the 'Prayer for Peace', based on his spirituality, has been adopted and used by people of all the great religions of the world. It is no longer the prerogative of the Franciscan family only.**

Because I was asked a short time ago to write for this particular journal, I thought about the probable Franciscan spirituality and, calling on my own frame of reference, I felt I wanted to ask, 'Whence comes that peace?' The Franciscan prayer for peace reminds us how to practise peace, and that inner state of quiet, that oft-quoted still point, of the essence in mystics such as he, is of course the work of grace. But what can practitioners do in upholding their need to participate in the process?

My long stay in the Orient tells me immediately that the beginnings of peace are to be found in silence. Japanese Zen Buddhists call this *anshin*, which most faithfully translated is *peace of mind*. They almost take it for granted that that is why the thousands have been going to Oriental masters for the last thirty years, for *anshin*, peace of mind. And, in my experience, the best of those masters reveal their secret of the centuries by teaching disciples how to be truly silent.

The peace of mind which silence brings is not just a psychological state, nor is it the repression of thought or expression. One of the most eminent sages of our time, Raimon Panikkar, gave a seminar on silence here some months ago. He said, 'Even though silence says nothing, it is the realisation of our true nature.' When I placed myself at the feet of one of the greatest Zen Masters of the century, he responded, 'I will help you to become a better Christian through the means of the silence of Zen meditation.' He was, in reality, pointing to that experience of realisation. The only condition on which he would accept disciples was that they would choose as their goal to come to experience.

This is where *anshin* will be found, and it has existed as a hunger in human beings throughout the ages. For the Oriental Masters, once deeply experienced, the realisation answers the fundamental problem of life and death.

Silence is the meeting point of time and eternity. Silence is not a vacuum but rather the impetus of infinite power that moves us. It is an eye-opener – the third eye, as the ancients put it. And it is the third eye that sees the hidden dimension, from which come our hope and peace.

We westerners usually think of silence as having to do with the mind. But in practice, we discover that, for meditation, we have to

still the body as well. If it chatters away, so will the mind. We do this not for control but in a be-ing sort of way, for we learn the best physical position for meditation, which we offer the body opportunity to assume. This process demands asceticism and, hence, the need mentioned above for discipline.

Nor do we control the mind. Panikkar's articulation: 'As the mind becomes silent, the third eye of human consciousness opens and the teaching of Jesus on the sound eye giving health to the whole person (Matthew 6.22) is realised in personal experience.' My Zen Buddhist Master taught that when the third eye opens, we experience not only life but also that *that* life never ends. Only people who have not experienced life will fear death. Once deeply realised, they have no fear of death. Thus, the fundamental problem can be solved and *anshin* is within grasp.

We in the Prison Phoenix Trust are attempting to bring that peace to prisoners using the same means: silence and experience. When I first introduce a meditation class to inmates, I usually try to catch their interest by saying that the Beatles and I went to the Orient at about the same time and we were seeking the same thing. Many among our two thousand five hundred prisoners, with whom we, the Trust, are in letter-contact concerning their spiritual growth, seek to go beyond the therapeutic effects to a certain realisation in experience.

We find that young offenders are, perhaps, the most difficult to work with, as they seem to be sizzling most of the time. And yet, when I speak of inmates having even a tiny opening of the third eye, I most frequently quote from a young offender's letter: 'As long as I can remember, I have had this hurt inside. I can't get away from it and sometimes I cut or burn myself so that the pain will be in a different place and on the outside. Then I saw the Prison Phoenix Trust Newsletter, and something spoke to me about meditation and, although I really didn't know what it was, I wrote for your book. I just want you to know that after only four weeks of meditating half an hour in the morning and the same at night, not only is the pain not so bad but, for the first time in my life, I can see a tiny spark of something within myself that I can like.'

Christians also have long regarded silent, contemplative prayer as the way to

experience God, but I was never able to find, during my formative years in North America, help in holding silence. Step One in the Orient was to embark on discipline, which I was to learn later brings us freedom, the discipline of bringing the body and mind to silence.

So I was taught a silent body (the Japanese bath *ofuro* was a great help in loosening tight groin muscles) and how to maintain silence in consciousness. No thinking, no feeling, no remembering, no imagining, etc., just silence whilst directing our perception into the in-breath and out-breath. It doesn't happen overnight but, as the mind becomes silent, the third eye begins to open in experience. One soon discovers that the difference between understanding what happens and experiencing it is like the difference between understanding electricity and touching a live wire.

The Zen experience is called *kensho* in Japanese. *Ken* is 'to see' and *sho* is your 'true nature'. As a teacher, I can say that we confirm an experience as *kensho* when it meets a certain criterion. In other words, people reveal by their very words what they 'saw' with the third eye. Rather frequently when I read Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross, or Tauler or Hugh of St Victor, I recognise third eye encounters!

Oriental Masters say that the *anshin* of real peace comes when we have solved, to our satisfaction, the ultimate problem of life and death. Without any apology, my Buddhist Master used to say 'at the end of our life here, we do not die.' Not empty words, for I had the privilege of being with him during his last hours. Indeed, at some moment, he just ceased breathing. There seemed no death at all. He had lain there in silence for about five months, in a deep state of consciousness, 'attending to unfinished business' his wife said. In the end, life was not taken away, it was merely changed into an eternal peace which was his final endowment and greatest teaching to us his disciples.



Sister Elaine belongs to Our Lady's Missionary Congregation, which she joined in Canada in 1953. Much of her time has been spent teaching Zen, and her book Light Sitting in Light was reviewed in the May edition of franciscan



# Let Demonising of British Muslims end

by Philip Lewis

## No one has a view from nowhere. My own experience of Christian-Muslim relations has been shaped by three contexts.

First, I spent six years in the Christian Study Centre in Pakistan, where I sought to make sense of Islam in its distinctive South Asian dress. Historically, Islam in India was rooted in the hearts and minds of non-Arabic speakers by dynasties of sufi 'saints', who generated Islam's devotional hymns in the vernacular languages. These religious songs with their criticism of bookish scholars - ulama - who know nothing of love, have consoled and delighted Muslims for over half a millennium. Such sufi fraternities were not politically quietist but often provided the backbone of opposition to non-Muslim invasion.

Alongside this tradition, the trauma of colonial conquest generated a range of Muslim responses: an *apolitical revivalism*, rejecting western intellectual and cultural influences; *Islamic modernism*, seeking to remain faithful to Islam yet open to an honest engagement with the west; '*Islamism*', a *religio-political movement* presenting Islam as a total ideology providing the basic framework of meaning and direction for political, social and cultural life.

The second context is Bradford where, for over a decade, I have worked as an Interfaith Adviser to the Bishop. Here, I have begun to see emerging a British expression of Islam, both locally and nationally. Let me illustrate this with three recent encounters. First, an LSE graduate, Mr Sohail Nakhooda, has just returned from Rome where he spent two years with the Dominicans studying Catholic theology. Although from a Gujarati background, Sohail was brought up in Mozambique, spoke Portuguese and found Italian easy to learn. He is now studying for an MA in Protestant theology at a British university. He works for the Islamic Foundation in Leicester in their Interfaith Unit, which produces the excellent *Encounters, Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives*. Here, then, a Muslim institute is laying the foundation for a serious theological meeting with Christians. Secondly, Dr Hussain, a former research scholar at Nottingham University, has earned a PhD in medical biochemistry from Birmingham University and then spent a year in a traditional Islamic seminary in Pakistan, from where his family originated, and finally gained a BA in Islamic Studies from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the oldest and most prestigious seat of Islamic learning in the world. Dr Hussain draws on this wide range of experience as a Director

of a Mosque and editor of a Muslim magazine in English, *The Invitation*, self-consciously seeking to engage with British Muslim youth. He has also had a formative role in developing an Islamic seminary in Britain. Finally, Mr Mahmud Al-Rashid, a young barrister from a Bangladeshi background, is responsible for creating an Association of Muslim Lawyers and its newsletter. The aim of this is to network and encourage British Muslims in the legal profession and from *within* to become an advocate of the special needs of Muslims. Such a constructive engagement with the institutions of British society is now becoming increasingly common. This reflects the coming of age of a new generation of British-educated Muslim professionals.

*Muslims are not religious in general but Muslim in specific ways, shaped by particular histories and cultures. They . . . have generated different styles of leadership and patterns of interpretation and application of sacred texts.*

The third context is Leeds University department of theology and religious studies, where I lecture part-time. Here, I have taught and interacted with Muslim students from Indonesia, Turkey and Iran, and British Muslims – most of the latter from South Asian backgrounds. Muslims, one soon discovers, are not religious in general but Muslim in specific ways, shaped by particular histories and cultures. They share broad Islamic commonalities of belief and practice, meet on pilgrimage, but for the rest have generated different styles of leadership and patterns of interpretation and application of sacred texts. Of course, some movements transcend national boundaries and with developments in communications technology, transport and information – globalisation – Muslims at different parts of the world are more aware of the sufferings of co-religionists in Bosnia, Chechnya, Israel and Kashmir. However, any notion of monolithic Islam is soon challenged by such

an experience! What has also become apparent to me is that, worldwide, all religions are very much back on the political agenda. All are challenging the notion that 'consensual norms and ultimate values can be located in a secular or non-religious source.'

So far, I have not mentioned the dreaded 'f' word – *fundamentalism*. The reason is that a word coined within American Protestant history to encapsulate a concern with right doctrines, particularly that of inerrancy of scripture, often in association with an apolitical stance, is not readily transferable to religions such as Islam and Orthodox Judaism, which are more concerned with right practice. However, this is not to argue that contemporary Islam in Britain is without its fringe of radical militants. One such maverick figure, the Syrian Omar Karki Mohammed, was recently profiled on Channel 4 – the 'Tottenham Ayatollah'. Such figures are attractive to some students from traditional Muslim backgrounds, who cannot connect with Muslim religious leaders in the Mosques, most of whom continue to be imported from South Asia with little English and even less understanding of British society.

The leadership, dynamics and rhetoric of radical Muslim groups has been vividly and sympathetically drawn in a recent novel – *The Black Album* – by Hanif Kureishi. In the figure of the student leaders, Riaz, Kureishi communicates and captures their appeal. Riaz's Sunday talks in the Mosque, 'were well attended by a growing audience of young people, mostly local . . . Asians. Not being an aged obscurantist, Riaz was becoming the most popular speaker . . . he entitled his talks, *Rave from the Grave?*, *Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve*, *Islam: A Blast from the Past or a Force for the Future?* and *Democracy is a Hypocrisy*'.

It would be wrong to exaggerate the numbers involved or the significance of such groups. However, the danger of such movements is twofold: its inflammatory literature reinforces stereotypes about Muslims already part of the 'common-sense' world of many in British society and the media – see the Runnymede Trust's recent consultation document, *Islamophobia, its features and dangers* – and also threatens to undercut support for Muslim student groups concerned to enable a real engagement with wider society.

What is particularly worrying is that British Muslims, and more particularly those of Pakistani background, have assumed the space that the Irish Catholics once inhabited in British demonology. There is little difference between Paddy-baiting and Pakibashing: the Irish were blamed by the indigenous working class for depreciating wages; they spoke a different language, were socialised into a separate world and assumed to defer to the priest; Catholicism was considered a synonym for superstition, moral corruption, intolerance and potential treason, with the assumption that the papacy

# Minister's Letter

**Brother Daniel,  
Minister General of the First Order Brothers,  
writes:**

Changing a job, or taking up a new position is always a time to reflect upon our journey through life. I find I have been doing this in the last few months, starting with thinking about the Ministers General whom I have known, the type of people they were, their gifts and talents and the way they operated in the position, leading our Society through many changes. I found lots of inspiration and more than a little doubt about my own gifts.

Change seems to have been the mark of our Church and Society for as long as I can remember. Since joining SSF in 1964, I have seen so many changes in our ways of operating, many of them naturally due to the fact that we are now in so many different countries. Change has also taken place in our World, some good and some not so good. Loyalty and commitment, or rather lack of them, could be seen as hallmarks of our World and Church in this age.

Recently, at a conference in Canberra, one of the speakers addressed this in terms of the younger generation, using as an example the wearing of various styles of trainers as the cool thing to do. The message that was given, he said, was "Yes, I go along with wearing these because they are in style, they are cool." The fact that the laces are not tied states "but I am not committed to these in the long term."

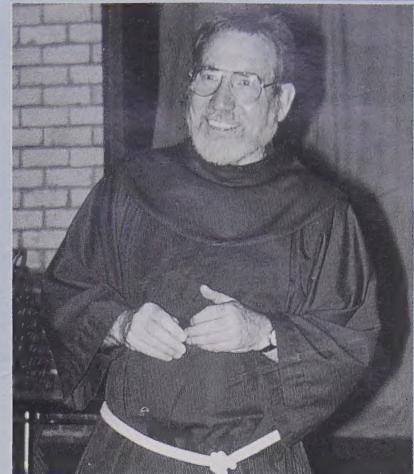
Not long after that, I read an article 'The Foot Washing', by Sandra Schneiders. In this, three ways of service are noted and applied to Peter's reluctance to have his feet washed by Jesus. These three ways

appear in our everyday experience, and their interaction can give an insight into our ways of ministry and thinking. In the first model, service is seen as what the server must do for the served, because of some right or power which the served is understood to possess: it springs from subordination and inequality. The server is bound by any number of relationships, such as child to parent, slave to owner, subject to ruler.

The second is that service is performed freely for the served, because of some perceived need in the served, which the server has the power to meet. This is seen in such examples as the services of doctor to patient, welfare worker to client, teacher to pupil, professional to lay person, rich to poor. The service rendered is a statement of the superiority of the one and the dependence of the other.

The third model was that of service from friendship, the one human relationship based on equality. God so loved the world as to give God's only Son to save us. Jesus' self gift was not the master's redemption of unworthy slaves but an act of friendship. "No longer do I call you servants, I call you friends"; a model of equality and mutual service.

Our Lord's command to love one another and wash one another's feet is a command to the apostles that they should live out among themselves the love of friendship, with its delight in mutual service, that knows no order of importance, which Jesus is beginning. The hospitality, warm



friendship, acceptance and welcome that is offered in so many ways in our houses seems to be in line with this idea of participation in Jesus' transforming work. In the true simplicity of Francis, we can assert that all are of equal value and importance, which goes contrary to so much of what is seen in our world. Sandra Schneiders ends by saying that 'at least one meaning of the foot-washing for contemporary disciples lies not in an understanding of Christian ministry in terms of self-humiliation or individual acts of menial service, but as a participation in Jesus' work of transforming the sinful structures of domination operative in human society, according to the model of friendship, expressing itself in joyful mutual service unto death.'

May I wish you all a joyful Francistide.

Daniel SSF

rather than the crown was the active centre of loyalty and affection. Between the wars, they moved into labour politics but were mistrusted on three accounts: they pressed for denominational schooling rather than secular education; they were opposed to birth control' and they viewed the

presence in areas of high Muslim settlement. The priority is to develop relationships, maintain contacts and identify areas where we can work together with integrity. This is an exacting ministry requiring a long-term engagement. It requires considerable wisdom and patience. Muslims are constantly under the media spotlight and are the most researched minority in Britain. At times, they long simply to be left alone and given the space to develop their own patterns of accommodation with wider society, away from the glare of media attention. Nonetheless, Christian concern and presence is welcomed. An enquiry into the Bradford riots in a Muslim area two years ago and a dissenting report by the Muslim Commissioner have recently been published. Both commended the role of the Churches. Let me conclude with some comments by the Commissioner:

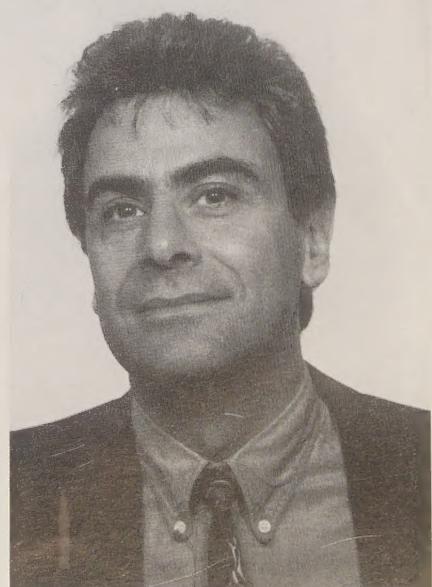
"[The Christian Churches] have been committed and active in promoting good inter-communal relationships and in speaking out on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged. The Anglican Churches have shown particular vigour in this field and have maintained a considerable presence

**What is crucial is that  
Churches commit themselves  
to maintaining a Christian  
presence in areas of high  
Muslim settlement**

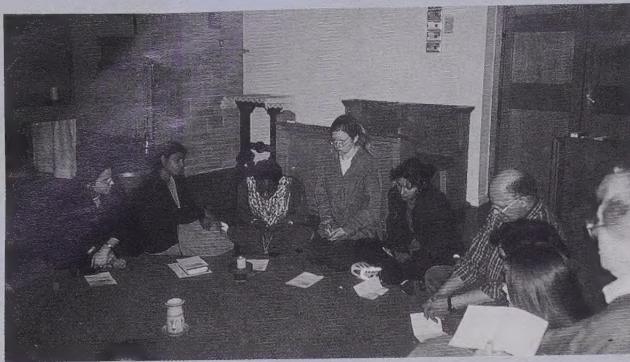
communists in the Spanish Civil War with hostility for alleged atrocities against Catholic clergy. For the Protestant and liberal imagination, they were the significant 'other' in contrast to whom identity was defined. It is clear that Muslims rather than Irish Catholics are now the awkward minority for liberal and Christian alike.

What is crucial is that Churches commit themselves to maintaining a Christian

in the area, at a significant cost, with valuable effect. They deserve recognition from the wider community . . ."



Dr Philip Lewis's authoritative book *Islamic Britain* was published in 1994 by Tauris



A regular visit from students at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London; here they are giving thanks for the marriage of two of their number, who met at the Convent



Sister Jackie  
setting off for the 'Opportunities Playgroup' in Yeovil



Gillian Morrison, who is living with the community for six months

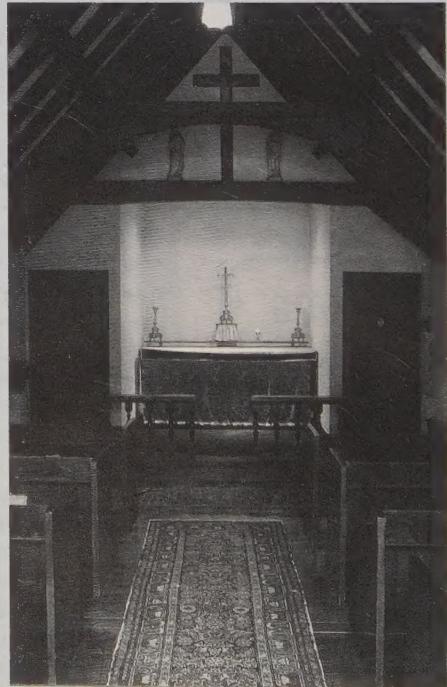


Encouraging the greenhouse effect-iveness

# St Francis' Con-



The regular House Meeting, where decision-making is shared



The 'top' chapel in the Convent,  
used for private prayer  
and the reservation of the blessed sacrament

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*Some of the visitors to Open Day  
listen and watch attentively*



*... making time for people ...*



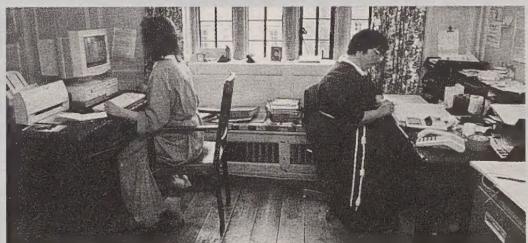
*Kate takes her turn at cooking lunch*



*Michael Scott-Joynt, Bishop of Winchester  
and Protector of the European Province,  
presides at the Compton Durville Open Day  
complete with improvised altar frontal*



*'Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise thee'*



*Pat, dealing with guest bookings  
and Moyra, at the bursar's desk*



*Pat encourages guests to feel at home*

# Community Routes



L'Osservatore Romano

*Brother Brian at the Permanent International Ecumenical Consultation of Religious, in Rome*

## ◆◆ Freeland Abbess

At Freeland, knowing that in May Patricia would end her maximum term of office, the Sisters spent time in discussing the sections *Of the Mother* in the Constitution of the Community of St Clare. No longer did the sisters feel that 'Mother' was the appropriate title for their elected leader. Having looked at, and rejected several other possible ways in which she could be addressed when circumstances demand some title, it was decided to return to roots and use 'Abbess', as do all other Poor Clares.



*Sister Paula OSC, newly-elected Abbess of the Community of St Clare at Freeland*

After that, they then elected Paula as their Abbess for the next three years. Earlier this year she had celebrated her silver jubilee of profession. She is known to many already as the printer.

For the same reason also, in future the sisters will use OSC (Order of St Clare) after their names, although they will retain 'The Community of St Clare' as the overall name of the community.

## ◆◆ Brother Brian retires 'not-out'

Brother Daniel writes:

"Where is Brian at the moment?" This is a question often asked in any of the ANZ houses: the reply is usually, "Where is the Test match?" Brian's usual response when he hears of this is a little grin. His love of cricket is well-known, from his days of playing at Popondetta to his sharing of cricket books and stories with Phyllis in the Solomons, to say nothing of his fairly regular arrival in Brisbane when there is a test at the Gabba.

Brian is also much-loved for his sense of humour and his ability to laugh at himself. He is a man full of joy and peace: this is seen whether he is baking bread, giving some quiet advice or falling asleep as soon as the key is put in the ignition when he is being driven somewhere.

In his many years in SSF, Brian has repeatedly asked permission to lead a life of prayer as a hermit. He has tried to do this a number of times: first at Alangaula in the Solomons, but not long afterwards he was

asked to be Novice Guardian. He tried again at Stroud in New South Wales, only to be elected Minister Provincial of the ANZ Province. After he completed that term of office, he tried again at Stroud and then he was called by the wider SSF brothers to be Minister General of the First Order. In all this time while holding office, Brian has kept up his life of prayer, taking his hermitage with him, while being obedient to the call of our community. His presence in any of our houses seems to add an air of peace and stability. From 1st July, he is now again going to reside at Stroud, where he has truly sunk roots, with the added burden or joy that he has been asked to write some books to aid our young brothers in the Pacific Islands Province with their study. I am sure his great gifts as a spiritual director and retreat conductor will also be in great demand.

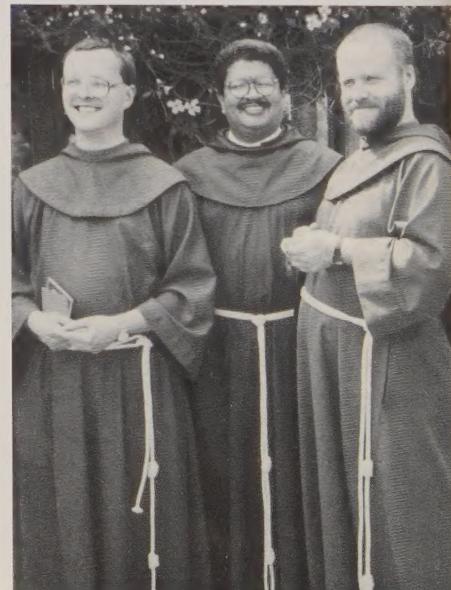
Thank you, Brian, for your example in living your life as a follower of our Lord in the way of Saint Francis.

## ◆◆ Ministerial Appointments

**Damian** was re-elected as Minister Provincial SSF in the European Province, for a further term of five years. He has re-appointed **Samuel** as his Assistant Minister and **John Francis** as the new Novice Guardian.

**Colin Wilfred** has been elected to succeed **Daniel** as Minister Provincial of the Australia/New Zealand Province.

Daniel has appointed **Paschal** as General Secretary of the First Order Brothers worldwide, in succession to **Tristam**, who has completed fourteen years in the rôle.



*Desmond Alban, Nolan Tobias and Philip, who were professed in first vows recently*



*Brother David Francis, on the day of his ordination to the priesthood*

## ◆◆ Provincial Migrant

**Bruce-Paul** has arrived in the UK from the Australia/New Zealand Province, where he has lived for the last twenty-two years. His particular interest is in the integration of ministry formation and spirituality, and he has recently pursued this in his studies for a postgraduate degree from General Theological Seminary in New York.

## ◆◆ Alnmouth Activities

Hospitality to guests remains a vital part of the ministry of Alnmouth Friary and various improvements to the house have been made in recent months. The cloister has been beautifully tiled and, through the labours of a local joiner, has now been enclosed, although two pairs of doors can still be opened on summer days. This means that the Blessed Sacrament Chapel can be kept warm on winter days, and this work was carried out in conjunction with a major overhaul of the heating system of the entire house. Facilities for disabled guests have been improved, especially with the addition of hand-rails and ramps in the beautiful gardens. A new prayer hut has recently been erected in a small enclosure garden. The numbers of both guests and day visitors finding their way to the Friary remain high.

## ◆◆ Interfaith Encounter

Palm Sunday weekend saw probably the last of a number of annual visits to Compton Durville by students from the School of Oriental and African Studies, part of London University. Led by one of their lecturers, now retired, the students, of many nationalities and of all faiths and none, met

to study a theme together, had a chance to talk to some of the sisters about their life, and the opportunity to join them in chapel if they wished. Meal times became an occasion of stimulating theological discussion; and this year the sisters had the joy of joining the students in thanksgiving for the marriage of two of their number, one of Jewish origin, one a Muslim, who had first met on a previous visit a few years ago

## ◆◆ Ecumenical Pilgrimage

On Saturday April 12th, hundreds of Franciscans gathered at the Franciscan Study Centre, Canterbury, for an ecumenical service, prior to a walk of witness from Greyfriars to Canterbury Cathedral for choral Evensong. SSF was well represented by many brothers and sisters of the First and Third Orders. This was undoubtedly the largest assembly of Franciscans in Canterbury since 1974, when the seven-hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the first Franciscans in England was celebrated.

## ◆◆ Franciscan Lecture

**Dr Petà Dunstan**, the Librarian of the Divinity Faculty at the University of Cambridge, gave the 1997 Annual Franciscan Lecture at Hilfield during the Brothers' Provincial General Chapter in June. Her lecture discussed the origins of the Society and the individual charism of three of the founders. This serious reassessment of some of the caricatures and myths SSF has inherited was enthusiastically received by the brothers; it also whetted their appetite for Dr Dunstan's book, *This Poor Sort*, a history of the Brothers in the European Province of SSF, which has now been published. It is available from Hilfield Friary Bookshop, price £19.95 (plus £2 p&p).

Joyce Yarrow CSF



*Brother Colin Wilfred, newly-elected Minister Provincial for the SSF brothers in Australia/New Zealand*

## ◆◆ Roundup

In July the remaining members of the 'new' CSF house in Birmingham arrived: **Angela Mary, Elizabeth, Veronica and May CP** from Hythe, and **Alison Mary, Angela Helen and Barbara** from Compton . . . **Chad San Andres and Nicholas Alan** have moved to SSF's new house at Ley Hill, Birmingham . . . **Robert** has moved to Plaistow . . . **Rowan Clare** has moved to Newcastle-under-Lyme, and **Beverley** to Compton Durville . . . **Rose** has moved to Brixton . . . **Oswin Paul, Christopher and Martin Philip** move to Glasshampton in early September . . . **Sue** moves to Brixton in early October.

**David Francis** and **Alan** were ordained priest in June: David in Edinburgh and Alan in Newcastle.

**Kentigern John** has been elected to the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church. **David** expects to be professed in first vows on 12 September at Hilfield.

**Reginald** is making a good recovery after major heart surgery.

**Jason** has been granted Leave of Absence. **Joyce Griffin** and **Jean Te Puna** have been released from first vows . . . **Mark Nicholas** has been secularised.



*Sister Nan and peregrinating Tertiaries on the Franciscan Pilgrimage to Canterbury*

Joyce Yarrow CSF



# Why I Left

by Terry O'Brien

I recently returned to Hilfield Friary for a weekend – the first time for three and a half years. I was not sure why I was going, what my reception would be, or whether it was wise to go at all. I have to say that the gardens were the loveliest I have known them. While there I read a series of articles in *franciscan*, under the titles *Why I Came*, *Why I Stayed*, *Why they Left* and *Why?* I felt there needed to be some response along the lines of *Why I Left*.

I first visited Hilfield about twelve years ago and, between then and arriving there to live as an Aspirant just over five years ago, I had visited the Glasshampton, Birmingham and Paddington houses and got to know several of the brothers.

I had to test out my vocation – I was so inspired by Francis' life and felt so much about the life I saw. I could not get on with my life with this urgency hanging over me, and words of the hymn that goes: 'What can I give him? Give him my heart' came to have such intensity.

*I know my life was changed and that I was converted in a way that could not have happened any other wise. I am not diminished by it – and there is no reason for regrets.*

*I now realise that I let no one down. SSF gave me the opportunity to serve in community, and an opportunity to be served by community.*

Over the three and a half years since I left, I had felt that I had let my brothers down in leaving – though I could only see that on my return last weekend. I guess there is something mutual in that, though I can only guess how others feel. The reasons for leaving are complex – and probably very different for a novice or someone in first profession or life profession – and I can identify no single reason; I am sure the reasons why anyone leaves are as different as the reasons for joining in the first place.

Leaving, for me, was not done lightly, and the difficulty in reaching that decision was as big a thing as the decision to come. It was very painful to leave and I am grateful that I

had time away from the community – keeping the Rule – to make that decision. Ironically, my leave was not prompted by a need to address the issue of leaving; however, time at Glasshampton shines light in dark corners of the soul which one would rather not know about.

So: reasons for going! Seeing a life profession ceremony, and knowing deep down 'I can never do that' – then it is just a matter of time before you go. Seeing one's own vocation spoiled, in tatters, as one gropes to put it back together again – having lost sight of what it was all about in the first place. Hopes, dreams and intentions shattered – a broken person trying to be whole. Brokenness, weakness and failure in the one thing that mattered.

But, of course, this is precisely what the novitiate is all about – testing one's vocation. In testing that vocation, some will find confirmation whilst others will leave. It can be no other way.

I have regrets – regrets that I did not do it better – that I did not live the life to which I had aspired. But I have good memories of people, times and places. I know my life was changed and that I was converted in a way that could not have happened any other wise. I am 'doing well' and 'happily married' now – but I can talk to a guy camped-out in a shop doorway and look him in the eye: we do not fear each other now.

I have come to see vocation as more than I had done previously. For me, we are all called – in Christ – to be the persons he created us to be. A vocation to the Religious Life, it seems to me now, is a form with which we clothe that vocation – there are as many vocations in SSF as there are brothers, and each becomes himself as God intended by taking on that form in community. For others, we may become less than God intended and the form may become damaged – so, we leave to find how we can best express that unique person God created us to be.

For me, the change had come in that I had become more fully human. When I left, I was not sure where it would lead, whether I would one day return to Hilfield wearing a habit, or at dead of night as a wayfarer. I

certainly never expected to fall in love and get married. But then, that is what vocation is all about – being brothers and sisters in Christ, being true to ourselves, each other, God and the world. And we never know where it will lead us. In my experience, it does not stop when we leave SSF – but SSF may have put us onto the track to discover it.

*Seeing a life profession ceremony and knowing deep down*

*'I can never do that' – then it is just a matter of time before you go*

Personally, I am grateful to have been given the opportunity – and I know that I am a better person through it. I am not diminished by it – and there is no reason for regrets. I now realise that I let no one down. SSF gave me the opportunity to serve in community, and an opportunity to be served by community. The truth is, if more people came and went, the world would be a better place.



*The icon of the Stigmata of St Francis painted by Brother Anselm OSB, of Alton Abbey, and now in the chapel at Alverna Friary at Gladstone Park, London*

# Book Reviews

Philip Wilmot

## Stepping Stones to Paradise

Pondside Publishing, 1996, £5.75

This slim volume containing twenty-three sermons is a gem. Mind you, I was surprised it was ever published, because although from time to time I have heard Philip Wilmot preach in St Swithun's, Winchester, I cannot ever recall him using notes. He seemed to know exactly what he wanted to say and quietly and succinctly to have said it. It was delivered so naturally, with eye contact, that it must have been memorised.

The sermons cover many of the great themes of Christian life, which are tackled using lively stories and images to make the links between our faith and our life in an uncomplicated and refreshing way.

The author is not afraid to reach back fifty years for a memory that illustrates a point – and you are invited into his world, as we hear for instance of the widow of the Chaplain General of the Forces and her unfortunate sister who had to eke out a living making corsets. It is these glimpses that make the sermons come to life.

The stories often show how our own experiences of life can confirm and illustrate the truths of the gospel and they are sprinkled with teaching and wise advice. Take Easter for instance: we are warned how Queen Victoria ordered hot water to be carried to the deceased Prince Consort's room every morning and fresh clothes laid out for him. But the past had gone. Laughter and repentance you will learn have much in common, as have angels and electricity. It was a good Sunday whenever Philip Wilmot preached.

Amos SSF

(Obtainable from 34 Hatherley Road, Winchester SO22 6RT)

Santha Bhattacharji

## God is an Earthquake

*The Spirituality of Margery Kempe*

DLT, 1997, £7.95

Bernard Bro OP

## The Little Way

*The Spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux*

DLT, 1997, £6.95

Margery Kempe was a controversial, medieval woman, to say the least. Born in 1373, she is certainly enigmatic and her spiritual experience included visions, screaming, shouting and tears – in public! Yet others have seen in her life evidence of a profound personal love for Christ and a witness to the dynamic confrontation of the human soul with God.

Santha Bhattacharji, a former Anglican nun and now lecturer in English at St Peter's College Oxford, takes Margery Kempe's witness seriously and provides a scholarly and sympathetic examination of her life,

writings, journeyings and spirituality, including her relationship with Lady Julian. This is certainly a book to be commended to those who have ignored or dismissed this remarkable woman, who bears witness to the goal of union with God. In speaking of those who lack this union, Margery does not indulge in the sensational torments of hell, as do others in this period, but wishes that 'no one be parted endlessly from your glorious face.' So in weeping for sinners, including souls in purgatory, she prays that they might have the joy of praising God without end, and her wonderful definition of heaven is made clear: 'Wheresoever God is, heaven is, and God is in your soul.'

Bhattacharji's final chapter, 'Was Margery a Mystic?', is a succinct and positive evaluation of the early chapters, pointing to this amazing woman as a vocal and vivid reminder of the earthquake mystery of God.

The second book concerns the spirituality of a very different woman – St Thérèse of Lisieux, 'the little flower' born exactly five hundred years after Margery in 1873. Here again, many people find an aversion to her person, but this time as 'irritating, boring and repulsive' – and those are the words of the theologian Father Karl Rahner. Bernard Bro does not ignore the sentimental and sugary words of Thérèse, nor the middle-class provincialism, ignorance of political life and her antithesis between this world as a 'vale of tears' and heaven as the only centre of interest. But he lays out, in the life, witness and teaching, the actual toughness of this woman who died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four. He uncovers spiritual treasure in this study and shows why this weak woman was a spiritual giant, a Carmelite nun who has affected the lives of millions – from Edith Piaf to the last five

popes! She is not a trap for the feeble, nor a tranquilliser for the pious, raining down roses upon the devout, but a warrior in her time and place, whose personal spirituality bears witness to the living God in a suffering world.

Ramon SSF

Christopher Donaldson

## Martin of Tours

Canterbury Press Norwich, 1997 (2nd Ed), £7.99

When Augustine arrived in Canterbury in 597, one of his first acts was to baptise Ethelbert, King of Kent, in the church of Saint Martin: Martin's death had occurred exactly two hundred years before. The author of this book was himself Rector of this church for thirteen years; this must have sparked off his own devotion to the saint of whom he writes. His book was first published in 1980: the new edition has been produced this year in commemoration of Saint Martin's sixteenth centenary.

Certainly by medieval times, Martin had become established as a very popular saint. In Great Britain, no less than a hundred and seventy-four ancient churches are known to have been dedicated in his honour, and he is the only non-Biblical saint to be given two festivals in the calendar of *The Book of Common Prayer*. However, the full story of his life has hitherto received little attention and this book is certainly to be welcomed. It is a work of considerable scholarship, with copious footnotes, though it is written in a most attractive style, making for compelling reading.

The book provides not only a detailed biography of the saint but also a great deal of background history, covering the major situations of the time, for example the varying attitudes of successive Roman emperors toward Christianity and the doctrinal problems of the Church before and after the Council of Nicea. We also read of the influence of the cult of Saint Martin on some of the great pioneers of Celtic Christianity in the British Isles, such as Patrick and Columba. A useful chronological table of events (covering ten pages) is given at the beginning.

Martin stands out in the book as one who passionately loved God and whose dedication knew no bounds. As a bishop, he showed great humility and a truly pastoral heart, together with a burning desire to proclaim the truth of the gospel at whatever cost. As a shining example of his humility, we are told that his episcopal 'throne' was a three-legged milking stool, deliberately chosen as a way of identifying himself with the peasant folk whom he served.

He had never wanted to be a bishop at all. He had felt called to live as a simple hermit until death. The author shows that most bishops at the time had clearly become increasingly embroiled in imperial and ecclesiastical politics, but that the people of Tours required a man of prayer. So they literally forced Martin to be their bishop.

During his episcopate, Martin lived as a

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monk. He was in fact laying the foundations of western monasticism upon which Benedict and others would build in later times. He was not only very frugal in his own life, but he was exceedingly strict with those who came to join him. The author points to his military training as the source of his disciplined life, which he now put to the service of God.

The photograph on the cover of the book is a reproduction of the roundel over Saint Martin's altar in Canterbury Cathedral. It portrays the well-known story of his dividing his cloak to share with a beggar, which incidentally is the point at which most people's knowledge of Martin stops! But the book does not paint a picture of a somewhat pallid, stained-glass-window saint. On the contrary, we are exposed to his somewhat fiery temperament, exhibited in the destruction of pagan shrines and temples, but all within the context of his zeal for the faith. It has to be remembered that the whole concept of InterFaith dialogue would have been totally foreign to the age.

If you would like to know more about this very attractive and yet ascetic saint, you could not do better than to read this book, and you will certainly enjoy it. If, however, your interests are wider, and you are looking for new insights into fourth-century Christianity, you will not be disappointed.

Martin SSF

Brother Michael SSF

**A Word in Time**

Colt Books, 1997, £9.95

Brother Michael rarely turns down requests, hence this compelling collection of sermons and addresses so attractively produced.

## *The Guest House at Hilfield Friary*

will be closed for renovation to  
all the guests rooms (and  
particularly to make the house  
accessible to the disabled)  
from 27 December 1997  
to 6 April 1998.  
The community at Hilfield  
regrets any inconvenience  
this will cause those who  
would have wanted to stay  
during this time.

Priority is given to those preached in St Bene't's Church, Cambridge, a centrifugal force in Michael's early and more recent ministry, a place he has loved for its austere beauty and its people, where there is a resonance of prayer reaching back into the first millennium, enriched in this century by the lively presence of the friars.

The remaining two-thirds represent a wider ministry to the Church, as Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Ely, as celebrity preacher responding to the call of friends and finally helping Anglican Primates to prepare for the Lambeth Conference of 1988. What, I

wonder, are we to read into the sermon entitled 'Epiphany at Sandringham'? Some of the most engaging are given over entirely to showing God at work in the lives of remarkable people: Mahatma Gandhi and his influence on C F Andrews, Michael Ramsey, Father Benson SSJE, Bishop King of Lincoln, Charles Wesley and Saint Francis of Assisi. Surprisingly, there is a common thread in the lives of these 'Witnesses to the Word': the pursuit of holiness matched by a burning desire to share the vision, in turn inspiring others and becoming a source of renewal.

For those who believe that a sermon should conclude having made three points, I will try to collect my thoughts. Firstly, having heard one or two of those sermons when first delivered, it was good to discover that they lose none of their brightness and immediacy in print. They do not set out to be biographical but they are revealing. There is, to borrow the phrase from TS Eliot, 'a condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything.' Michael's preaching is enriched by all that he gives to it of himself. Secondly, the theological base is entirely incarnational: God's love in all its power and glory at a particular time in a particular place when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. *A Word in Time* is also a word always in season and in context. Thirdly, popular preaching and Franciscanism go together. It is historically one of the charisms of the Franciscan Order and it is good to see the tradition renewed and continued in this book.

Christopher Chessun

## *Theme Prayer*

*Eternal God,*

*whose image is in the hearts of all people:*

*help us to remember that you love all people with your great  
love,*

*help us to recognise you in words of truth and things of  
beauty*

*and in the actions of love about us.*

*We pray through Christ,*

*who is a stranger to no one more than another*

*and to every land no less than another.*

*Amen.*

(World Council of Churches, Vancouver Assembly 1983)

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| 4.00 pm              | <i>Afternoon Tea</i>   |
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# A Passage to India

by James Anthony SSF

Neasden. The symbol of suburban banality in the mocking pages of *Private Eye*. The home of IKEA. The never-ending traffic of the North Circular Road thundering past an enormous branch of Tesco, temple of consumer Britain. Five minutes walk down a quiet side street is another Temple, a white marble vision that seems to have just landed from some other world and that might as easily take off again and sail away.

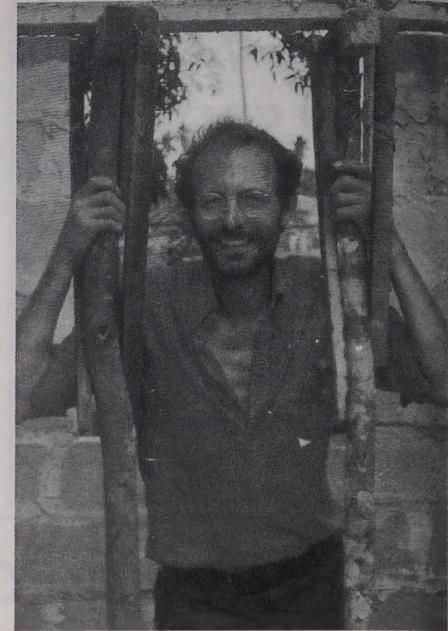
There is a surreal feeling to it. Not Disneyland exactly, because the white marble is really white marble and not plastic, but there is something of that feel about it. Perhaps it is India's answer to the early-English Gothic churches left behind by the Raj in that sub-continent.

The Shri Swaminarayan Mandir was built between 1992 and 1995 by the Swaminarayan movement, together with a large and very impressive community centre next door. The founder of the movement, Lord Swaminarayan, lived in Gujarat at the end of the eighteenth century. He started a renewal movement in Hinduism which, led by a succession of Gurus, has spread worldwide. All of this is imaginatively explained in the exhibition in the undercroft of the Temple, along with a pretty comprehensive

display of the glories of Hinduism.

Here, again, I felt the bemusement of a traveller in a strange land, a different world. I felt overwhelmed by numbers: Swamiji has read and replied to 435,000 letters; the Rig Veda has 10,552 mantras; Sanscrit has sixty-five words for earth and seventy words for water; two thousand tons of Carrara marble were carved by fifteen hundred craftsmen into more than twenty-six thousand pieces. I floundered, at sea in the amorphous vastness of Mother India, without landmarks with which to navigate.

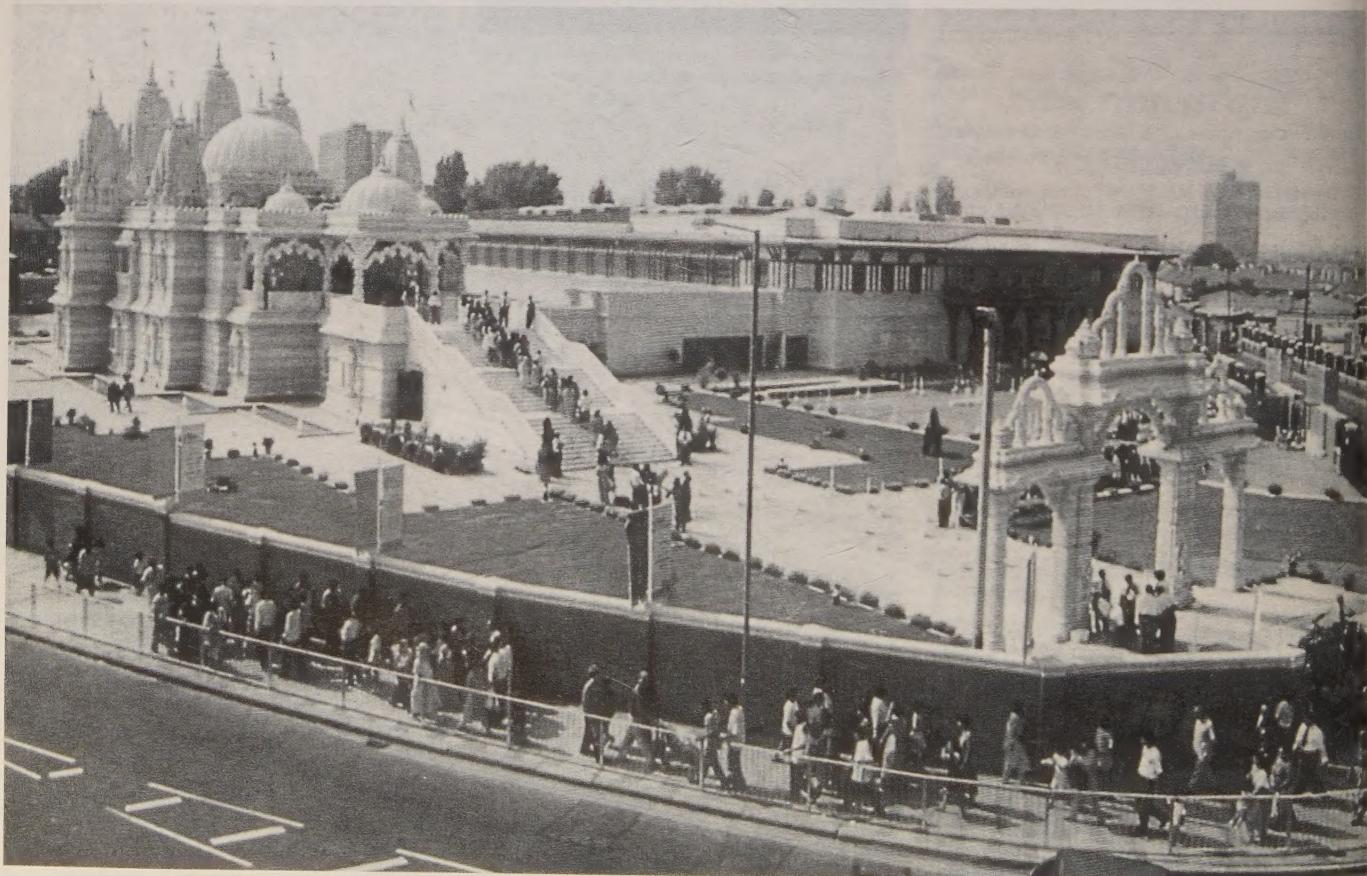
Upstairs, in the white-domed Mandir, strangely enough, I felt more at home. In size and plan it was very much like an Orthodox Church, and the worshippers brought a homeliness to the quiet transcendence much like Orthodox worship.



*Brother James Anthony lives and works in Stepney in the East End of London*

The figures of Shiva and Parvati, Hanuman, Akshar and Purushottam, could easily have been exchanged for Ikons of the Panagia or Pantokrator, Michael or John the Forerunner. Here was a place where reverence and worship came easily, 'where the mind becomes still, and the soul floats free.'

Perhaps it is here, and only here, in the stillness, in quietness, in the place where all our traditions, forms and words fade away, that we can find that deep unity beyond all our diversities.



Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

*Shri Swaminarayan Mandir and Swaminarayan Haveli, at Neasden, London*